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RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO PRIORITY 0409  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT AU PRINCE 000659

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/EX AND WHA/CAR, S/CRS, INL FOR KEVIN BROWN,  
HEATHER WILD, AND MEAGAN MCBRIDE  
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD, STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CAR,  
INR/IAA, DS/IP/WHA, WHA/EX PLEASE PASS USOAS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/20/2019

TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM ASEC HA SA

SUBJECT: LAVALAS MARCH FOR ARISTIDE'S BIRTHDAY DRAWS MODEST CROWD

REF: REF: 08 PORT AU PRINCE 1016

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Thomas C. Tighe,  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: A July 15 Fanmi Lavalas Demonstration to mark Jean Bertrand Aristide's birthday was peaceful and attended by at most a few thousand supporters. Fanmi Lavalas ability to bring people into the streets is declining. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Fanmi Lavalas (FL) supporters marched peacefully July 15 from morning until mid-afternoon to mark the 56th birthday of former President Jean Bertrand Aristide. Press estimates of the number of participants range from 500 to "thousands," with the crowd largest at the concluding rally on Constitution Square downtown. MINUSTAH estimated the crowd at 2,500. The area surrounding the National Palace was under strict security measures by the Haitian National Police (HNP) and MINUSTAH. The HNP escorted the demonstrators along much of the way.

¶3. (SBU) The march remained peaceful throughout the day, and has been the case with FL demonstrations the last several years. PolOffs observed the demonstrators in front of the Parliament, where the crowd numbered several hundred, with more of a festival atmosphere than that of a structured rally. Demonstrators brandished placards calling for Aristide's return to Haiti, branding President Preval a traitor (Note: for having deserted the Fanmi Lavalas party and having banned its candidates from Senate elections. End note.), and supporting the minimum wage law. Photos of Aristide showed him wearing a red mortarboard; he has been studying 'neuro-linguistics' and writing a Ph.D. dissertation at a South African university.

¶4. (SBU) Press reports say that Annette Auguste (aka So Ann) addressed the rally by calling for unity within FL, along with Rene Civil, one of the party's best known activists. (Note: So Ann is a FL Executive Committee member; while she publicly broke away from the rest of the Committee in 2008, she still appears at important Lavalas anniversaries. End note.) No other major leader made a public appearance, and the event received very little press coverage. The anti-Aristide faction of Fanmi Lavalas, led by former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune, did not participate in the rally.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: The turnout was no larger than last year's

demonstration on the same occasion (reftel). This and smaller FL demonstrations protesting the exclusion of FL candidates from Senate elections demonstrate a declining Fanmi Lavalas ability to bring masses into the streets. This low turnout is also a product of the split within the FL party between pro- and anti-Aristide factions. Yves Cristalin, a Counselor to President Preval and a former Deputy, and Deputy Jonas Coffy, both affiliated with the reformist and anti-Aristide Lavalas, told PolOffs on July 13 that their side had refused to participate in the demonstration. At a workshop organized July 11 at an exclusive hotel in Port-au-Prince, partisans of this faction, loosely under the leadership of former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune, reasserted their intention to either rewrite the Charter of the FL party or formally break away from the party. This split is likely to deepen with the upcoming Presidential and Parliamentary elections, especially given the disqualification of all FL candidates in the Senatorial elections of April 2009.

TIGHE